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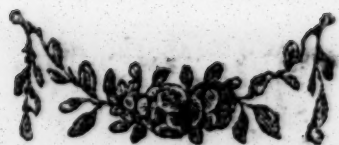
MATRICULATION.

A

POEM.



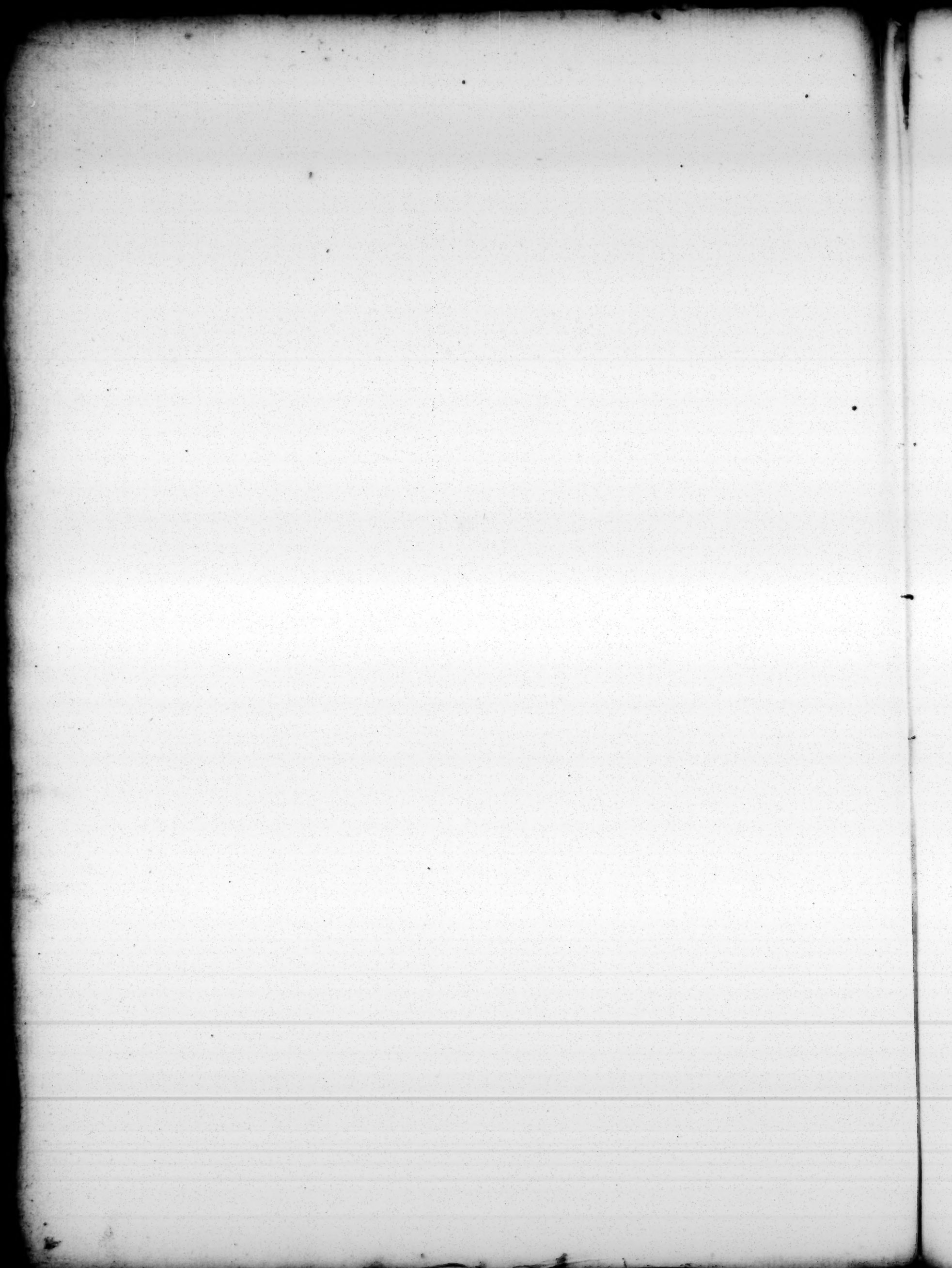
Quæque ipse miserrima vidi.



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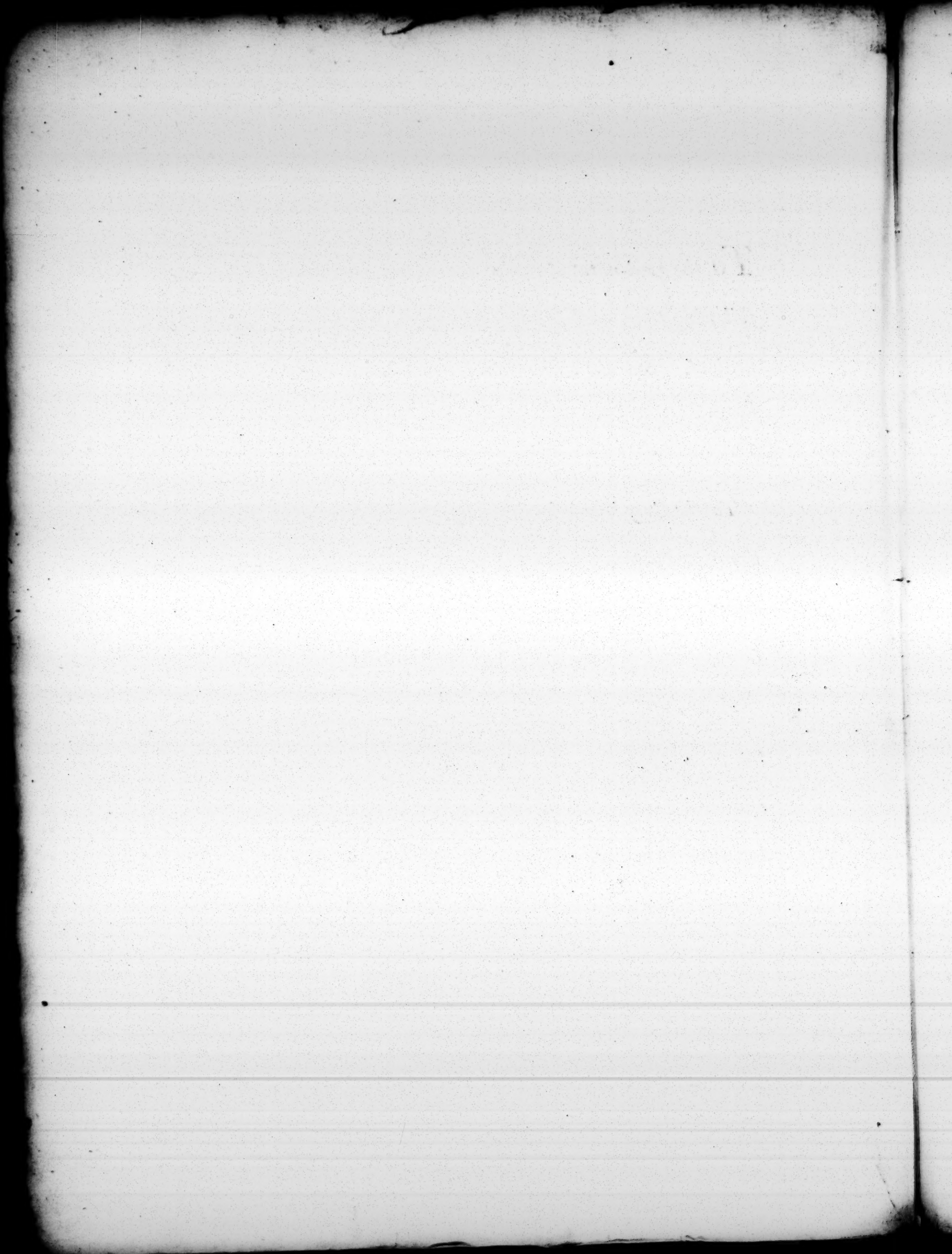
1798.



To the good-natured reader the author most humbly offers the following piece, well knowing how much indulgence he stands in need of. But those who read for amusement do not read to find fault.

To the Grey-beards he can only premise this in its favour—that it is the production of a young hand—and that youth is no crime.

He has used capital letters at the beginning of sentences only, not from affectation, but because it helps the reader to the sense, and more particularly in blank verse, where the sentence so seldom begins with the line.



MATRICULATION.

A P O E M.

W H E N spurning the tyrannical controul
of ireful pedagogue, the ardent youth
enrolls his name to sweep the sable train
thro' Granta's cloisters, or Oxonian schools;
the glad commencement of his gay career
I sing. Whom apter would the muse select,
his deeds to blazon in immortal verse.

Severest trials, conflicts sore sustain'd
with hardihood, and certain dangers met
with ready courage; fierce resistance made
in honour's nice defence, bespeak the youth
the future college-hero. Thus begins
his strict novitiate, hard to be endur'd.
Behold him bidden to the shatter'd rooms
of some fly lurcher, oft employ'd before

the timid stranger or to hunt, or foil
with bottle frequent-doubling. Thoughtless he
of federated foes, nor dreams the glass
to him o'erflowing each succeeding round
with buzz, or scone or bumper-toast, is pour'd
but with a motive generous as the juice.—
Too emulous he with veterans dares to cope,
opposing art with courage ; and himself
unpractis'd in deceit, marks nor around
each hackney'd stratagem successful. This
feigns illness, and a mingled potions sips.
Another, vig'lant of averted looks,
his glass soft-sliding 'neath the table pours,
and Turkey's richest manufacture, oft
distan'd before, the purple juice distains.
Whilst glass of small dimensions some retain,
or fill unbrimming,—others empty not,
or with a vain pretence, demand excuse.

Meanwhile the bottle circumambient,
replenish'd oft, he temerarious bibs ;
nor feels with rapid stride the rebel foe
advance t' o'erfet the empire of the brain ;
for wine betrays with confidence of strength.

Symptoms

Symptoms of inebriety appear.

The party mark his elevated voice,
and rolling eyeballs. Now they charge amain,
fast-vollying ; and could he with retreat
inglorious, that were vain, hemm'd round by foes.

But he sustains the heat of battle well ;
And e'en the veteran toaster half repents
the fierce engagement ; for his vacant bin
scarcely sends forth supplies. But still enough
remains ; for now at length by wine subdu'd,
(whom will not wine subdue ?) the hero falls.

As he furnamed AGONISTES fell,
he falls not unreveng'd ; the opposing board
promiscuous spread with crystals half-discharg'd,
and goblets vitreous, or large or small,
sudden, with all his ponderous falling weight
impell'd, resistless dash'd against the lines
form'd opposite, and levell'd to the ground
Philistines vile, an undistinguish'd host.
Horrid dilapidation, and dire crash.

They but awhile astonied lie; and soon
upstart, emerging from the dreadful wreck;
tho' sore with many a ghastly wound or bruise.
But long the vanquish'd champion had remain'd,
inert and motionless, had not the song
bucolic, (not quite blotted from their minds,)
recall'd to memory how the shepherd lads
the old SILENUS once surpriz'd in sleep,
his veins yet swell'n with yesterday's debauch.
They with his faded garlands strait constrain
his limbs in wreathy fetters, and detain
old soaker in close durance till he sings.
Thus then the bacchanalian rout surround
their victim; from the floor impure his corpse
recumbent to the sofa's ample space
uplifting, where extends the lifeless lump.

His unresisting arms are pinion'd straight,
and, without one indignant kick, his feet
submit to shackles; tho' not done thro' fear
of resurrection, or to fight or fly;
but tauntingly to heighten his disgrace.
A chaphlet quick of fragrant baum they weave,

angelica, confection-making plant,
and burrage, sweetest herbs in tankard-cool ;
with which, small honour, they his temples crown ;
and then in antic measures dancing round,
mock requiems chaunt to his departed sense.
Nor ends the ceremony here ; for now
the corpse by all its members well confin'd
they seize, and so consign it to the place
appointed for the rest of those that sleep.

Thus on where Caledonian hills extend
tow'rds th' arctic circle, if some puissant chief
of Cameronian, or Macclellan clan
must, hapless, hide his honours in the dust ;
in hordes the vassals throng the gloomy dome
to swell the pomp funereal. But before
the last sad duty to their lord is paid,
the hall is spread with hospitable fare.
They eat, they drink, they feast ; and maudlin rave
to see the corpse borne off ; and eddying round
they press upon the pall, as on it moves
in slow procession, shouting as they go.

But

But who can speak th' unutterable pangs,
cholic and melancholic, that infest
the youth, when morn revisits him with light.
He wakes indeed, but horror soon succeeds
to stupefaction! As he rolls around
his eyes that witness huge dismay; what sights
affrights him! What offensive stench exhales,
horrible in th' nostril, from the clammy flood
of wine disgorg'd, and undigested lumps
of flesh putrescent which around him float!
Vain his attempts to mitigate the thirst
of moisture-lacking palate; whilst he swells
with unavailing draughts his dropfied chest.
Intestine racks torment him; and his brain
on fire; compunction goads his lab'ring soul.

But rash young man forbear from sacred oaths
of abstinence eternal from the glass,
prescrib'd in temperance for the stomach's sake.
Thy present sufferings soon shall be forgot
like pains of parturition; throes and vows
remember'd not in th' impulse of desire.
Go seek the wholesome dairy for relief,

its distance not regretting, where uncheck'd,
swill of balsamic diuretick whey.

But see again his friends of yesternight
burst on him, his confusion to encrease,
and ridicule his most acute distress
with mock condolence. His complexion wan
deepens to scarlet with indignant blood,
which for his honour flies, alarm'd to hear
the repetition of the drunken farce.
But vain is fix'd resentment here, and ire
implacable, but folly. 'Tis a mark
of wisdom to forget a drunken row.

He listens to their overtures of peace,
and amnesty of past affronts, which they
from motive base solicit, that again
the freshman may afford delicious sport.

But each now seems officiously concern'd
to dissipate the heavy gloom that clouds
his aspect, and the languor that pervades
his feverish limbs. All exercise prescribe

promoting

promoting perspiration, to divert
from pain or grief; and quick propose a plan
aquatic; (an extemporary hit
appearing, tho' premeditated long.)

The water was his favour'd element;
and well-experienc'd he in every art,
or fly manœuvre, known in nautic skill.
The river, ocean, or canal confin'd
to him were sources of delight as pure
as their own limpid fountains. He could plunge
undaunted, headlong, from the precipice
o'er-imminent, into the glassy flood,
and breast the strongest torrent; or immers'd,
full many a fathom shoot along the wave.
With steady hand and eye he knew to keep
his equipoise upon a single plank,
soft-gliding down the smooth canal. The skiff,
or light canoe, with paddle, or with scull
he gaily manag'd; and his nervous arm,
feath'ring his oar, could dash with measur'd strokes
the smoky swell, for in regattas oft
had he the prize divided. But his pride

was

was chiefly in the guidance of the helm.
Transported he would spring on board the sail
pinnacle or shallop, and with eager gripe
seize on the rudder, and the hawsers flip.
The canvass bellying with the buxom breeze
when proper to contract or luff to wind
he knew; or shifting, to the larboard tack,
or starboard. Well was he of all inform'd.

Then starting, for the sail they all prepare,
equipt in jerkin blue, and pantaloon;
for dress marine alone distinguish'd them,
fair-weather sailors. Some the boatman hail,
to loose and oar the dolphin or centaur.
Some board the pennon'd cutter, by the breeze
invited; whilst uncertain in his choice,
the easy youth submits to their advice.
The row, the row, for exercise all cry;
but every oar was mann'd; this well they knew,
a preconcerted scheme. The ready skiff
is order'd, and he daringly commits
his person to the fragile bottom; soon
to be repented; not for want of skill.

Now to the mid-stream one and all stand out ;
when the proud steerfman from the painted poop
proclaims a challenge to the liquid race.
And tho' the contest promis'd to be vain,
they show their courage prompt. Along the yard
the canvass spreads, and on before the breeze
the cutter spooms away. With busy scull
the solitary freshman drives his shell,
the lagging boat outstripping, as the sail
with winged speed skims far of all ahead.

At equal distances they thus succeed
awhile, in th' undulating element
making incision deep with sharp'ned keels.
But urging on to where the sinuous flood
winds short and rapid, the misguided bark
strikes fast aground, just as the pausing breeze
suspends its impulse on the slacken'd sails.
Here whilst they labour at the lifted pole,
and tug to leave the shore, the hodmandod
steals onward in his shell ; and ere again
they navigate the stream, he passes by
exulting. Ah ! how little weening he

that

that purposely they suffer him to pass.
'Tis vain to triumph ere we reach the goal :
for extricated now, and bearing down
with light'ned sails ; resiftless on the skiff
they press, pretending ignorance to steer.
He who but now had victory ensur'd,
too late perceiv'd, that loss of that were nought
could he effect escape. He hesitates
whether to turn to leeward or to wind,
and from th' uncertain bearing of the sail
feels certain danger. Now she rushes on
impetuous ; and as he thwarts the stream,
with weak endeavours to escape a wreck,
he feels the fatal shock ; the beaked prow
whirls him with thunder headlong from his seat,
and scatters to the waves the shiver'd planks.
Thus in the whelming flood with sudden plunge
immers'd, he flound'ring beats around bereft
of promptitude of mind ; his strait'ned limbs
their wonted parts unable to perform.

Unhappy youth ! thy fate had been indeed
deplorable, but for the river nymph,

thy fautrefs kind, whose fparing urn had pour'd
a fhallow current o'er the yellow fands,
where for thy fole a refting place thou found'ft,
o'er which with dubious, flound'ring ftep to crawl,
and fhiv'ring, limping, dripping gain the fhore.
Thus dearly from his irritated blood
expell'd the fever ; and the burning thirft
which feem'd infatiable, completely drench'd.

What boots it to lament in idle words
difafters paff, for remedy too late ?
Mark the Batavian, flow to grief, unmov'd
at fmall mishaps, in philofophick guife
reflecting on what ills of worfe import
might have befall'n him ; thus he foon confoles
and reconciles himfelf to all events.

Experienc is a fcarce commodity,
and ever dearly purchas'd. Some, 'tis true,
more early ripen to difcretion ; but
thofe instances are rare and wonderful.
How few, by one misfortune warn'd, keep watch
on the defensive, ftudious to prevent

(prevention,

(prevention, human wisdom's chiefest act)
the repetition of annoyance sad.

You shipwreck'd lad, now basking on the bank ;
could he, by this short trial of his friends,
in bonds of amity but newly sworn,
presage what worse events may still result
from such connections ; profitable then
had been the sufferings of these little ills,
guarding him from associates false ; their plans
too nicely cover'd for detection, urg'd
with plea seductive, and design'd to please ;
who but of sympathy a semblance bear,
and meditate again, beneath that veil
more toils delusive, to ensnare the youth.

Prick'd by the latent hook, the finny fry
return no more to the delusive bait.
The wary tenant of the air, if once
he 'scapes the viscous twig, can be no more
decoy'd ; both instinct-warn'd. But the proud race
of mortals, reason-inform'd, who walk erect
with arrogance of look, tho' worsted oft

by ambuscading foe, to the same snare
are by imposing feint seduc'd again.

The youth of easy faith, tho' smarting still,
in memory, of the recent overthrow
in bacchanalian war, is thus allur'd
by bland persuasion, or by wounded pride
arous'd, to rally, and resume the glass.
Again with honesty he drinks, he fills ;
still unobservant of the juggling shifts
afresh impos'd upon him to avoid
the brunt of compotation : tho' not now
their purpose, as before, to sink the sense
in bestial oblivion ; but to raise
a few degrees the mercury of the mind.

Their giddy wishes seasonably succeed.
And as the link boy, harbinger of night,
what time the dim crepuscle melts away
to pitchy darkness, o'er the pavement 'lumes
with meteorous torch the galaxy of lamps,
they take him rambling to the town, enchain'd

within

within their locking arms. Boisterous and loud
they bawl, thro' echoing cloisters as they roll.

Thus issuing forth they gain the peopled streets,
where regulated crowds, to right or left
alternate yielding, pass unjustling on.

But spirits such as these will trample down
tame order, or police, the vulgar herd
well-suited to restrain; which moves along
as the canal its lab'ring body floats,
fluggish and still, where'er we cut its course.

They rolling like the flood, which works its way
where nature dictates; thro' disparted hills,
which ope to give it passage; or thro' woods
perforce upturn; or intersected meads.

And where weak opposition dares impede
its rapid course, with congregated powers
it bursts or overleaps the vain barrier,
dashing its white foam high. Thus high in blood
they drive along in quick capricious step,
yielding to none the honours of the wall.
And long insultingly they keep their ground
unrouted, thrusting many a filken hose

new-laund'red, into kennel vile. But mark
yon party, who so rapidly advance
in like uncertain humour; flying nymphs
and peaceful citizens, molested fore,
retire before their obvious approach,
betokening inclination to dispute.

The clashing ranks now meet, in furious tone
demanding each the pavement, and alike
refusing to file off. The row begins.
At first in wordy war they fiercely strive
to gain the straight defile; and gentleman
and honour, sacred terms, too oft prophan'd,
are bandied about. The passing crowd,
arrested by the jarring sounds, surround
the wrangling groupe, and with officious pains,
deem'd but impertinence, attempt in vain
a mediation, which still more incites
their fury; in the quarrel failing not
t' involve the mediators rash, with quick
contagion. When the truly valorous feel
indignities, that grate the generous soul,
with them it only aggravates th' affront

to

to offer compromise. Sudden with such
from hard words to hard blows the transit. Thus
the champion now of either side prepares
for combat ; and the eager youth steps forth
his party's hero to chastise the foe.
With like infuriate glance they each survey
his adversary's make ; and big alike
in bottle-valour, each ensures success.

Thus two alone commence the dire affray ;
and many a fist, with gladiatorian force
is aim'd and parried. Every feint and push
in pugilistick skill, is practis'd well.
The best made strokes are oft by wary guards
effectless rend'ed, wasting strength and wind.
The hollow chest resounds with many a blow
contusing fore ; and often retrograde
the weak'ned bruiser staggers. From the nose
springs forth the welling rill. The twinkling eye
sees lightning from collision severe.
The partisans of each bawl loud around
encouraging the fight ; all praying hard
to keep the circle, and free space ; whilst each

in pressing forward, still contracts the room.
Apace spectators thicken. Crowding heads,
of various standard, and of various forms,
compose the motley groupe. The velvet cap,
soft to the tender skull and touch, stands thick ;
innumerable press the broad-cloth-cover'd hof, and
vulgar herd of hats ; and here and there,
the uncover'd 'prentice 'scap'd from neighb'ring shop,
rides buoyant on the shoulders of the mob.
And hovering aloof, the bonnet gay
in parti-colours, and the white-bleach'd cap
await the fate of battle, to enjoy
the conqueror's triumph. Much the softer sex
the man of mettle at their hearts admire.

This way and that, by sudden fits commov'd,
as wheel the warriors, turbulent and loud
the crowd makes way ; and many a pendent sleeve
of tough prunello, or of glossy silk,
pluck'd sheer in quick convulsion, lines the street.
The frequent taper, brought to aid the night,
is oft extinguish'd, and as oft relum'd.

The din of battle, heard afar, alarms
the town at either end ; nor 'scapes the ear
of those who power-invested, with a nod
can still the tumult ; at whose presence fly
alike the vanquish'd and the conqueror ;
and at whose cabalistic call, the wight
luckless, in misdemeanor seen, must stay
his flying step. These in official garb
array'd, haste undelaying to the scene,
where reign confusion, and disorder foul.
Nor their arrival heard the combatants,
dissatisfied ; for now the tug of fight
had spent their breath, and nerveless made their blows ;
each well-dispos'd to yield, yet each in hopes
to see his weak'ning adversary fall.
Thus undecided, timely to preserve
of each the sinking honour, and the bets
on even chance depending, ends the fray.

Ill had the youth expected of his friends
to cover his retreat. They felt the force
of coward nature, prompting from within

self-preservation, and in flight they sought
their safety, unsolicitous for him.

To alley or to entry vile he flies
for shelter, where protected from pursuit
in shades obscure, he hears the storm blow off.
When cautious stepping forth, he glances round
his fearful looks, and undescrying harm,
sober'd, and sore with bruises, flinks away.

Thus once the rustic mouse induc'd to join
his gay convivial brother of the town,
deserting happy home, where temperance
and peace, Pythagorean blessings, kept
his life in even tenor, first conceiv'd
his past contented days, compar'd with now,
tasteless and despicable, as he lapt
the palate-tickling gravy, and ragout
high-season'd to the taste of epicures
in city-feasts delighting. Drunk with joy
he crams his little gullet, and with eye
of glutton, swallows every various dish.
But mark how short the intervals of bliss

bestow'd

bestow'd on mortals. Even as he dips
his dripping whiskers in the richest sauce,
reserv'd till last, he hears the near approach
of growling mastiff, and the human step,
to ears of mice tremendous : off he scuds
in fearful panic, and the dark recess
not prov'd by him secure, he scarcely gains
ere turn the creaking hinges. There he lies
trembling, and tortur'd with suspense, till night
flings round her darksome veil ; when creeping forth
he seeks again his cell, and homely food,
to live a troglodyte in constant peace.

When sturdy MENELAUS to the fight
dragg'd forth the youth reluctant, who alone
for amorous war was form'd ; the queen of love
observ'd th' unequal contest, and to save
her failing fav'rite, interpos'd a mist
impenetrably condens'd, in which involv'd,
he 'scap'd the vengeful Greek's dead-doing arm.
E'en thus my imitative muse has dar'd
to snatch, with borrow'd ingenuity,
her sinking hero from the dubious fight

by

by timely interruption. He nor falls
in battle, nor is led a captive sad.

Thro' such adventures has the muse pursu'd
in song not difficult, th' incautious youth,
her modesty unhock'd. But she declines
to follow, where his devious steps seduc'd
from virtuous ways, would lead to scenes unmeet
for virgin eyes, or the descriptive song.
A fervent, but an unavailing wish
she breathes, that virtue, conscience, modesty,
and calm reflection may his mind reclaim
from such inventions, which too surely lead
to ills unnumber'd; loss of honest fame
and dire disease, sadly deforming oft
the noblest feature of the human face
divine; in vain by Taliacotian art
repair'd. But tho' this consequence be known,
still has the Syren voice of wantonness
such charms alluring in the ear of youth,
that reason may her precepts preach unheard.

The

The giddiness of youth may deem that sport,
which oft eventually may cause effects
most deleterious, emptying the purse,
reducing health most precious, and the mind
oft incapacitating. Deign to hear,
young men, if not admonish'd by a sage,
a fellow-gownsmen's council. When the boy,
bursting Wintonian, or Carthusian walls,
(where long in durance hard, immur'd he lay,
aggriev'd full sore, by the inflicting hand
of far-renown'd flay-bottomist ;) inlists
among the number of the gowned tribe
who train the robe virile ; then first he feels
his mind enlarging with his liberty,
and from a stripling passes into man
with quick transition. If he swells with pride
at such new honours, man and gownsmen made,
and too presumptuous, dares to emulate
the noble feats of more experienc'd men ;
whether of prowess, or of horsemanship,
of nautic knowledge, or of skating sure,
of bottle-bearing strength, or valorous act
of scaring citizens, a dastard race ;

then

then rather check his course with soft rebuke,
mov'd by pure charity ; and let advice,
timely applied, deter the forward youth.
Ungenerous is instigation then
to such contentions, where the consequence
at best produces biting ridicule,
and fell vexation ; oft calamities
most ruinous, the fracturing of limbs,
sad impositions, rustication dire ;
rend'ring the tufted honour of his head
the cap of folly, and the fable garb
of learning, mockery and masquerade.

THE END.

